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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of special education programs has exceeded the capability of teacher training programs in West Virginia to fill new positions in schools serving children with learning or behavior disorders. The focus of the Mainstream Practicum Project is to train regular educators who are currently working as untrained, uncredentialed personnel in mainstreaming programs in rural West Virginia schools so that they may be dually certified in regular and special education. This is to be accomplished by adapting existing special education training programs at West Virginia University to include a mainstream practicum model. Additional competencies needed to accomplish rural mainstream education have been identified and incorporated into coursework, the prepracticum seminar, and the practicum experience. These additional competencies include understanding the context of the rural school and its environment; recognizing the unique features of serving pupils with disabilities in rural settings; identifying best practices in rural education and rural special education; identifying effective rural service delivery models for pupils with disabilities; developing collaboration and consultation skills for working with rural educators, personnel, volunteers, and families; using available rural school and community resources to enhance instruction; and developing personal survival skills for coping with the unique challenges of working in mainstream settings in rural areas. This paper outlines program goals and objectives; teacher competencies covered by the program; program development and design; student recruitment and admission criteria; delivery of coursework and practicum experiences; and an evaluation plan that includes formative, summative, and ongoing evaluation. Contains 21 references. (TD)

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FOSTERING INTEGRATION IN RURAL CLASSROOMS: THE MAINSTREAM PRACTICUM PROJECT

The focus of the Mainstream Practicum Project is to train regular educators who are currently working as untrained, uncredentialed personnel in mainstreaming programs in rural areas of the state of West Virginia so that they may earn full qualifications in one or more areas of special education specialization. These professional personnel (who already have appropriate credentials in either elementary or secondary education) will complete all requirements for state teaching certification in either Mental Retardation, Learning Disabilities, or Behavior Disorders (and a Master's degree in Special Education if desired) via coursework delivered at off-campus centers, plus on-the-job supervision of practicum experiences in their own integrated classrooms. The project has enabled the Department of Special Education to expand its existing program to serve a new and growing preservice population: regular educators seeking additional endorsement in special education; some 100 part-time students will complete all requirements over a four (4) year period. Upon completion of their program of studies, these individuals will be fully trained and qualified to deliver state-of-the-art educational services to students with special needs who are placed in regular classrooms in rural schools.

The rapid and steady growth of special education programs has exceeded the capability of teacher training programs at colleges and universities in West Virginia to fill new positions in schools serving children with mild-to-moderate learning or behavior disorders. And, many graduates of traditional personnel preparation programs are reluctant to seek or remain in teaching positions in rural areas, where they face low salaries, poor working conditions, and possible social isolation. In addition, the high attrition rate of special education personnel has kept many existing positions unfilled or filled by uncertified teachers working on out-of-field or temporary substitute permits. This supply-demand imbalance has been particularly severe in the most rural areas of the state, where general personnel shortages and the unavailability of appropriately trained and certified teachers pose serious threats to the quality of special education programming. At the same time, as the state moves toward its goal of full inclusion, the need for teachers dually certified in regular and special education is growing, especially in rural schools where specialists are always in short supply. The Mainstream Practicum Project was designed both to address the supply/demand imbalance by increasing the number of educational personnel certified in special education as well as to improve the quality of regular education personnel working in mainstream settings by (1) recruiting regular educators from rural areas of the state into field-based graduate certification and degree programs in special education; (2) adapting the practicum service delivery model of the existing training programs in Mental Retardation, Learning Disabilities, and Behavior Disorders at West Virginia University to include a mainstream practicum model; and (3) increasing the pool of available educators trained and dually certified in regular and special education.

Need for Trained and Qualified Personnel

Current employment practices influence both the adequate supply of qualified special educators and the quality of educational programming provided to pupils. Many untrained teachers are hired to staff special education programs on out-of-field authorizations, temporary permits, or waivers. The demands of teaching special education often lead to stress and "burnout". Such attrition may be particularly severe for rural educators (O'Connor & Rotatori, 1987; Reetz, 1988). Untrained,

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highly stressed teachers are unlikely to deliver adequate or appropriate instruction to students, and they are very likely to leave their teaching positions (Greer & Greer, 1992). Although inservice training, staff development, and retention strategies designed to reduce "burnout" and turnover are largely the responsibility of local school districts, teacher education programs can, and must, insure that preservice programs provide training that will enable untrained, but practicing, teachers to gain needed skills quickly and that will provide them with strategies for coping with job stress.

In 1987, the federal government gave priority consideration to REI programs to strengthen the role of the regular education system in serving pupils with specialneeds. Since that time ever increasing numbers of pupils with mild-to-moderate (and sometimes even severe) learning and behavior disorders were placed in regular classes, most often at the elementary level. This has been an especially attractive option for rural schools, where severe shortages of fully trained special education personnel have forced regular educators to supply many of the special services needed by pupils with learning and behavior disorders (DePaepe & Walega, 1990; Zeph, 1990). To date, only a few experimental teacher education programs have undertaken the challenge of jointly preparing regular and special educators to work collaboratively in integrated schools (Bornfield, Dembinski, & Myles, 1991; Feden & Clabugh, 1986). Nevertheless, a number of authorities have predicted that current developments will lead inevitably to full inclusion by the year 2000 (Davila, 1991; Ludlow & Lombardi, 1992; Schrag, 1990; Smith-Davis, 1991). A recent survey of 137 leaders in the field of special education revealed that most professionals believe that special education will become a support system (rather than an alternative system) to regular education, which will take on primary responsibility for serving pupils with special needs (Hales & Carlson, 1992). Thus, the need for appropriately trained regular educators will continue to grow.

In response to these developments, many state education agencies (including West Virginia) now have reorganized pupil placement options to rely more heavily on the regular classroom as the primary placement. These new policies and practices require special educators and regular educators alike to retool to gain the appropriate skills to work effectively in this context. By and large, regular education teachers have been poorly prepared to address the individual needs of pupils with specific learning and behavior problems (Billingsley & Cross, 1991a; Wilson & Silverman, 1991). In addition, they frequently express negative or anxious attitudes about their ability to teach exceptional learners effectively, as well as the effects of mainstreaming on the educational progress of average learners in the class (Aksamit, 1990; Phillips, Allred, Brulle, & Shank, 1990). The few and widely scattered undergraduate preparation programs that seek to prepare regular educators for their mainstreamimg tasks cannot address the training needs of all current elementary and secondary teachers, most of whom have had little or no training or practice related to special education (Brady, Bornfield, & Ilmer, 1991; Calder, 1990). Only a handful of teacher education programs to date have undertaken to retrain regular educators in special education (Billingsley & Cross, 1991b; King, Sears, Rosenberg, & Fagen, 1992); such models, however, have been recommended as possible solutions to address teacher shortages in rural areas by recruiting individuals already established in and/orcommitted to the school system and locale.

In West Virginia, as in other places around the country, this situation has led to some problematic personnel practices. State policies and regulations currently permit, indeed, encourage placement of pupils with mild-to-moderate learning and behavior disorders in the regular classroom. A survey of school systems in West Virginia in summer 1993 revealed that several thousand regular educators are presently involved in some aspect of mainstreaming, and that the 1993-1994 school year will see a significant increase in this practice (Wienke & Ludlow, 1993). Nearly 70% of the administrators responding stated that all regular educators should have additional endorsement in special education, while the remaining 30% felt that teachers needed only inservice training. Many special educators who already have elementary or secondary education credentials have been transferred to regular classrooms where they now serve in the dual capacity as both regular and special educator serving pupils with special needs. Some school systems also have required regular educators to obtain additional endorsement in areas of special education specialization as greater numbers of such pupils have been placed in their classrooms. This practice puts considerable pressure on practicing teachers to enroll in a new preservice program to

acquire these additional competencies, precisely at a time when it is impossible for them to give up their teaching positions and financial security as well as when it it is undesirable to remove them, if only temporarily, from service.

Project Goals and Objectives

The project iwas designed to accomplish the following goals and objectives:

Goal 1: to design and field-test procedures and materials to develop rural mainstream teaching competencies in practicum students and regular/special education supervisory personnel

- Objective 1.1: to identify rural mainstream teaching competencies to be developed through the practicum experience
- Objective 1.2: to revise existing practicum procedures and materials to incorporate rural mainstream teaching competencies
- Objective 1.3: to revise existing supervisory personnel training procedures and materials to develop skills for promoting mainstream teaching by practicum students in regular /special education cooperating teachers and university supervisors
- Objective 1.4: to design and implement a pre-practicum seminar to refine rural mainstream teaching competencies in prospective practicum students
- Objective 1.5: to evaluate effectiveness of all procedures and materials in developing rural mainstream teaching competencies
- Objective 1.6: to disseminate rural mainstream teaching competencies, along with procedures and materials for developing them in practicum experiences

Goal 2: to design, implement, and evaluate a mainstream practicum model that uses field and university-based personnel to provide supervision to preservice students in on-the-job practicum experiences in rural regular education settings.

- Objective 2.1: to develop a service delivery model for a mainstream practicum model to be added to existing practicum options
- Objective 2.2: to offer the mainstream practicum model to students in the Fall and Spring academic semesters
- Objective 2.3: to evaluate the effectiveness and cost-efficiency of the mainstream practicum model
- Objective 2.4: to disseminate the procedures, materials, and effects of the mainstream practicum model

Goal 3: to increase the supply, quality, and retention rate of dually certified regular/special education personnel qualified to serve pupils with mild-to-moderate learning and behavior problems in rural regular classrooms in West Virginia

- Objective 3.1: to certify up to 100 teachers by the end of the four (4) year project period with dual certification in regular and special education
- Objective 3.2: to assess employment and retention patterns of project trainees to determine their service to pupils with disabilities in rural areas

Project Competencies

The existing certification programs in Mental Retardation, Learning Disabilities, and Behavior Disorders require completion of 12 hours of core courses plus six (6) hours of specialized courses and a 3-6 hour practicum experience in each area; students must complete 9-12 additional credits of required and elective coursework to earn a Master's degree. Existing practicum requirements specify that students must demonstrate fifty (50) program competencies, which are clustered into skills in four domains: preteaching skills, teaching skills, postteaching skills, and other professional skills. A listing of competencies, suggested validation activities, and procedures for documenting competency demonstration is included in the Practicum Handbook. In cooperation

with the cooperating teacher and university supervisor, the practicum student reviews program competencies and develops a plan outlining activities to demonstrate them. Supervisory personnel validate the student's demonstration of all competencies, and provide oral and written feedback on his/her teaching performance. Project staff identifed additional competencies needed to accomplish rural mainstream education and incorporated them into coursework, the pre-practicum seminar, and the practicum experience. These additional competencies included knowledge and skills such as:

--understanding the context of the rural school and its environment
--recognizing the unique featires of serving pupils with disabilities in rural settings
--identifying best practices in rural education and rural special education
--identifying effective rural service delivery models for pupils with disabilities
--developing collaboration and consultation skills for working with rural educators, related service personnel, volunteers, and families
--using available rural school and community resources to enhance instruction
--developing personal survival skills for coping with the unique challenges of working in mainstream settings in rural areas

Project Components

Program Development and Delivery

Practicum Eligibility Criteria Modification. Project staff modified eligibility criteria for practicum students and supervisory personnel to implement the Mainstream Practicum Model:

1. eligibility criteria for practicum students:
   a. completion of all required coursework
   b. employment for at least one (1) year in a regular classroom with at least two (2) mainstreamed pupils in the area of specialization for which certification is sought;
   c. permission from school authorities for practicum to be conducted in the job setting and agreement to provide one (1) regular educator and one (1) special educator to provide on-site supervision of a minimum of one (1) hour every other week each;
   d. satisfactory performance in the pre-practicum mainstreaming seminar;
   e. attendance at the orientation and enrollment in the practicum course;
2. eligibility criteria for cooperating teachers:
   a. regular educator must:
      i. be certified in elementary or secondary education;
      ii. possess a Master's degree in some area of education or a related field;
      iii. have at least three (3) years of teaching experienced in a regular classroom with mainstreamed pupils with special needs;
   b. special educator must:
      i. be certified in the special education area of specialization;
      ii. possess a Master's degree in some area of education or a related field;
      iii. have at least three (3) tears of teaching experience in special education including consultation with regular educators for mainstreamed pupils with special needs;
   c. both cooperating teachers must attend the mainstream supervisor training session and practicum orientation; and
3. eligibility criteria for university supervisors:
   a. certification in one or more areas of special education specialization;
   b. completion of a Master's or doctoral degree in special education;
   c. at least three (3) years of teaching experience in special education including consultation with regular educators for mainstreamed pupils with special needs;
   d. at least one (1) year of prior supervisory experience;
   e. satisfactory completion of SPED 391 Collaborative Consultation; and
   f. attendance at the mainstream supervisor training session and orientation.

Practicum Procedures Redesign. Project staff redesigned all practicum procedures to implement the Mainstream Practicum Model and incorporate mainstream teaching competencies:

1. modification of application and eligibility review process to include criteria for the mainstream practicum model;
2. modification of orientation session to explain requirements and procedures associated with the mainstream practicum model; and
3. modification of the supervisor training session to include strategies for supervising a mainstream practicum and
4. modification of the student evaluation and grading process to incorporate input and from both cooperating teachers as well as the university supervisor.

Practicum Materials Redesign. Project staff redesigned all practicum materials to implement the Mainstream Practicum Model and incorporate mainstream teaching competencies:

1. addition of mainstream practicum competencies eligibility criteria to Practicum Application and Eligibility Review Forms;
2. addition of mainstream practicum competencies and procedures for documenting them to Practicum Handbook;
3. addition of strategies for observing, coaching, critiquing, and evaluating mainstream teaching competencies to Supervisor Manual and Packets;
3. addition of information, resources, and activities related to mainstream teaching competencies and supervisory strategies to the Training Session Materials;
4. development of forms to assess mainstream teaching competencies and to evaluate the mainstream practicum model.

Supervisor Training Session Redesign. Project staff redesigned the supervisor training session procedures and materials to implement the Mainstream Practicum Model and incorporate mainstream teaching competencies:

1. identification of supervisor knowledge and skills that promote acquisition and demonstration of mainstream teaching competencies by practicum students;
2. design/development of videotapes, case studies, handouts, and individual and group activities to develop such knowledge and skills in the training session; and
3. design of an evaluation instrument and protocol for a supervisor debriefing session to assess the effectiveness of the supervisor training session.

Pre-practicum Seminar Design. Project staff designed a pre-practicum seminar to refine mainstream teaching competencies acquired during coursework and prepare students for the practicum experience:

1. selection of critical mainstream teaching competencies for refinement prior to the practicum experience;
2. identification of resources and materials to develop critical competencies;
3. design/development/preparation of lecture, discussion, media, and practice activities for delivery through a one (1) credit hour course prior to practicum;
4. design of assessment procedures (take-home case study-based essay tests and/or field-based application assignments to determine student proficiency in critical and readiness forpracticum; and
5. scheduling on pre-practicum seminar at a regional site on three (3) consecutive Saturdays at least one (1) month prior to each academic semester.

Student Services

Recruitment. Project staff have engaged in:

1. design of announcements and other recruitment materials to explain certification and degree opportunities in special education for regular educators;
2. distribution of announcements via mailings to individuals and agencies in West Virginia and at state meetings and conferences; and

3. mailings to program graduates requesting assistance in recruitment of regular education colleagues for the project.

Admissions/Program Plan. The Department Chairperson has engaged in:

1. processing of all inquiries and requests for applications by prospective students;
2. admission of applicants for graduate study as regular or provisional students at least three (3) times per year (Fall, Spring, Summer), using admissions criteria:
    a. undergraduate degree in elementary or secondary education from an accredited institution of higher education with GPA of 3.0 or better
    b. active professional teaching certificate in some area of elementary or secondary education or eligibility for certification in West Virginia
    c. current employment in a regular classroom in a public school system in West Virginia with mainstreamed pupils with special needs; and
3. development of a program of study approved by the official Academic Advisor; the program of study must meet the following requirements:
    a. a minimum of 18 credit hours of required coursework;
    b. a minimum of 3-6 hours of practicum experiences
    c. a minimum of 9 additional hours of required coursework (degree only)
    d. a minimum of 3-6 hours of elective coursework (degree only)

Delivery of Program Coursework. Department faculty are offering all required coursework at six (6) regional off-campus sites at least two (2) times during the project period, enabling students to complete all requirements to be eligible for enrollment in the practicum experience:

1. core courses (SPED 300, 301, 302, 303);
2. specialization courses (SPED 360, 362 in Mental Retardation; SPED 330, 332 in Learning Disabilities; SPED 340, 342 in Behavior Disorders); and
3. degree program courses (SPED 380, 382 and EDP 330).

Delivery of Practicum Experiences. Project staff are offering the Mainstream Practicum Model option in addition to full-time and on-the-job practicum options during each academic semester:

1. practicum experiences are conducted in the eastern half of the WVU service area in the Fall semester; and
2. practicum experiences are conducted in the western half of the WVU service area in the Spring semester.

Project Evaluation Plan

The WVU Dept.of Special Education employs a comprehensive, systematic evaluation plan based upon the Discrepancy Evaluation Model. The ongoing plan consists of measurement at regular intervals of student competency acquisition, student and staff satisfaction with program operation, and graduate performance on the job. Instruments and procedures designed specifically for the department's programs are used to collect data from a variety of sources: students, faculty, cooperating professionals, graduates, and employers. Data are used as input for decisions concerning development and modification of the departm,ent's graduate certification and degree programs. Within this model, program components are considered satisfactory if they meet the department's prespecified critreion of 75% effectiveness; components that fall below that criterion are reviewed by faculty to identify existing problems and potential solutions.

Formative Evaluation. Data collected during all phases of project operation are currently being used for formative evaluation to determine modifications in program design and delivery based upon feedback from participants and project staff during the pilot phase and each operational semester. These data have been used to refine operational procedures, measurement instruments, program content, and the service delivery system.

Summative Evaluation. Data collected from all operational semesters will be used for summative evaluation purposes to determine if the project was successful in meeting its goals, as well as whether it is a cost-efficient, workable alternative for teacher training programs in special education. The following evaluation plan will be introduced to assess the outcomes of the project at the summative stage:

1. Data on the effectiveness of the Mainstream Practicum Model will be collected by means of questionnaires and participant interviews to determine the extent to which the model operated as intended, as well as how well it compared with the traditional practicum model.
2. Data on the acquisition of mainstream teaching competencies will be collected by determining the number and criterion levels of competencies validated during the practicum experience across all students to insure that every student demonstrates adequate mainstream teaching competencies upon completion of the practicum experience; data on the development of supervisory skills by cooperating teachers and university supervisors to promote mainstream teaching by practicum students will be collected by means of review of practicum evaluation forms, self-evaluations, and evaluations by practicum students.
3. Data on the impact of the project on teacher supply, quality, and retention will be collected by monitoring WVU student records on number of graduates certified, graduate employment locations, and length of graduate employment, as well as state educational agency records on teacher shortages and teaching permits/waivers authorized.

Ongoing Evaluation. Evaluation procedures for the project will be incorporated into the existing program evaluation plan in the WVU Department of Special Education to insure continuous and comprehensive monitoring and assessment of program operation and outcomes.

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